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SUBJECT: TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FOREIGN MINISTER PAULA  
GOPEE-SCOON: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

REF: 07 PORT OF SPAIN 1185

Classified By: DCM LEN KUSNITZ; REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C/NF) Summary: New Foreign Minister Paula Gopee-Scoon has made a positive impression on the diplomatic community. Given her lack of international experience, though, she is still learning her position and the extent of her influence inside the government is unclear. The FM is friendly to the United States and interested in strengthening ties. With the Summit of the Americas on the horizon, Post recommends that consideration be given to the Secretary meeting with Gopee-Scoon, either in a dedicated bilateral setting or on the margins of a larger meeting. End Summary.

Just the Facts  
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12. (U) Paula Gopee-Scoon, one of seven children, was born on April 18, 1958 in Point Fortin, in the far south of the island of Trinidad. Her family ran a hardware business there. After attending primary school in Point Fortin, she studied at St. Joseph's Convent School in San Fernando. The future Foreign Minister received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Public Administration and Law from the Cave Hill, Barbados campus of the University of the West Indies in 1980, followed by a law degree (with honors) from the University of London, where she specialized in Labor and Public International Law, in the late 1990s.

13. (C/NF) Gopee-Scoon is married to Robert Scoon and has three children: Adrian, born in 1984, Jeremy, born in 1986, and Joanna (currently a third-year standout squash player at Princeton) born in 1987. The FM is especially close to her daughter and they communicate daily by e-mail and instant message, often around midnight. The FM's hobbies include collecting art, studying Caribbean culture, playing Scrabble and doing charitable work. Her favorites types of music are Calypso, Reggae, and classical. She speaks no foreign languages.

14. (SBU) Gopee-Scoon worked at Republic Bank from 1982-1986, then moved to Worker's Bank, Limited, where she was a branch manager in 1989 and 1990. She then worked at the Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, first as a Branch Manager, and later as the Assistant Manager of the credit department, from 1990-1996. She was also Executive Director of the firm Biochem (a sanitary supply firm) from 2002 until 2007, when she resigned her post after being elected as a Member of Parliament in November 2007. She reportedly ran the firm in an excellent manner and left it in good shape. Gopee-Scoon also served on the Board of Directors of Sunspot Plastics from 1982 until 2007.

## The Minister's Husband

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15. (C/NF) Robert Scoon is owner of Biochem and Sunspot Plastics. He speaks highly of his wife's work at Biochem and, in private conversations, has noted the difficulties that he, as a small businessman, has in retaining employees at his companies given the labor shortage on the island and the competition for workers from the oil and gas industry. Somewhat of a news junkie, Mr. Scoon frequently watches Fox News (CNN and MSNBC are not in the basic digital cable package here) and, referring to that channel's popular culture reputation, jokingly refers to himself as a "right-winger" due to the news he hears. Robert will sometimes, though not always, attend diplomatic functions with his wife. He is approachable, engaging and a pleasant conversational partner.

## Ties to Point Fortin and Entering the Cabinet

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16. (C/NF) When Gopee-Scoon was named as the PNM candidate for the Point Fortin constituency, she was little known to voters there, not having lived in the area since leaving for university training. Nevertheless, she won the seat and was a surprise choice for Minister of Foreign Affairs. Speculation at the time focused on her appointment being tied to Prime Minister Manning's interest in increasing the number of women in Cabinet. Manning also pointed out at the time (referring to his entire Cabinet) that he wanted to inject new faces, new blood and new energy into his re-elected government. Opposition politicians had a different spin -- that the PM was naming "non-entities" that he could control.

## Her Performance So Far

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17. (C/NF) The new Foreign Minister has been a hit on the diplomatic circuit. She is open, willing to engage on topics and not bound by protocol considerations when considering to whom to speak. The general line on her is that "she is a very nice woman" and we agree (also on her husband). Gopee-Scoon has positive feelings toward the U.S. and is interested in strengthening ties. Her first reaction, at least to date, when we ask for something is to consider how it might be done.

18. (C/NF) On the downside, Gopee-Scoon came to the Foreign Ministry without a strong international background and so far has not got much done. She refrained from appointments in her first weeks in office to give herself time to get up to speed on issues. In her initial speech to the diplomatic community last December, the new FM admitted she had much to learn. It remains unclear how much influence she has on Prime Minister Manning, though the impression is that the Foreign Ministry is looked at as a secondary post and key international decisions remain in the hands of the PM.

## A Foreign Minister with Potential

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19. (C/NF) Nonetheless, Gopee-Scoon has the intelligence and personality to become a more important figure in the Cabinet, but she will have to work on it and success is by no means assured. With the Summit of the Americas on the horizon, Post recommends that consideration be given to the Secretary meeting with Gopee-Scoon, either in a dedicated bilateral setting or on the margins of a larger meeting. A meeting would not only allow for a discussion on cooperation at the Summit (the MFA is involved, though the Summit Coordinator reports directly to the PM), but also an exploration of the bilateral agenda. In addition, it would send a message to Trinidad and Tobago and the region of our interest in strong ties and bolster the Foreign Minister's pro-American voice in Cabinet discussions.

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